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# *WEEKLY SUMMARY*

## *Special Report*

*Soviet Reactions to the Changes in Czechoslovakia*

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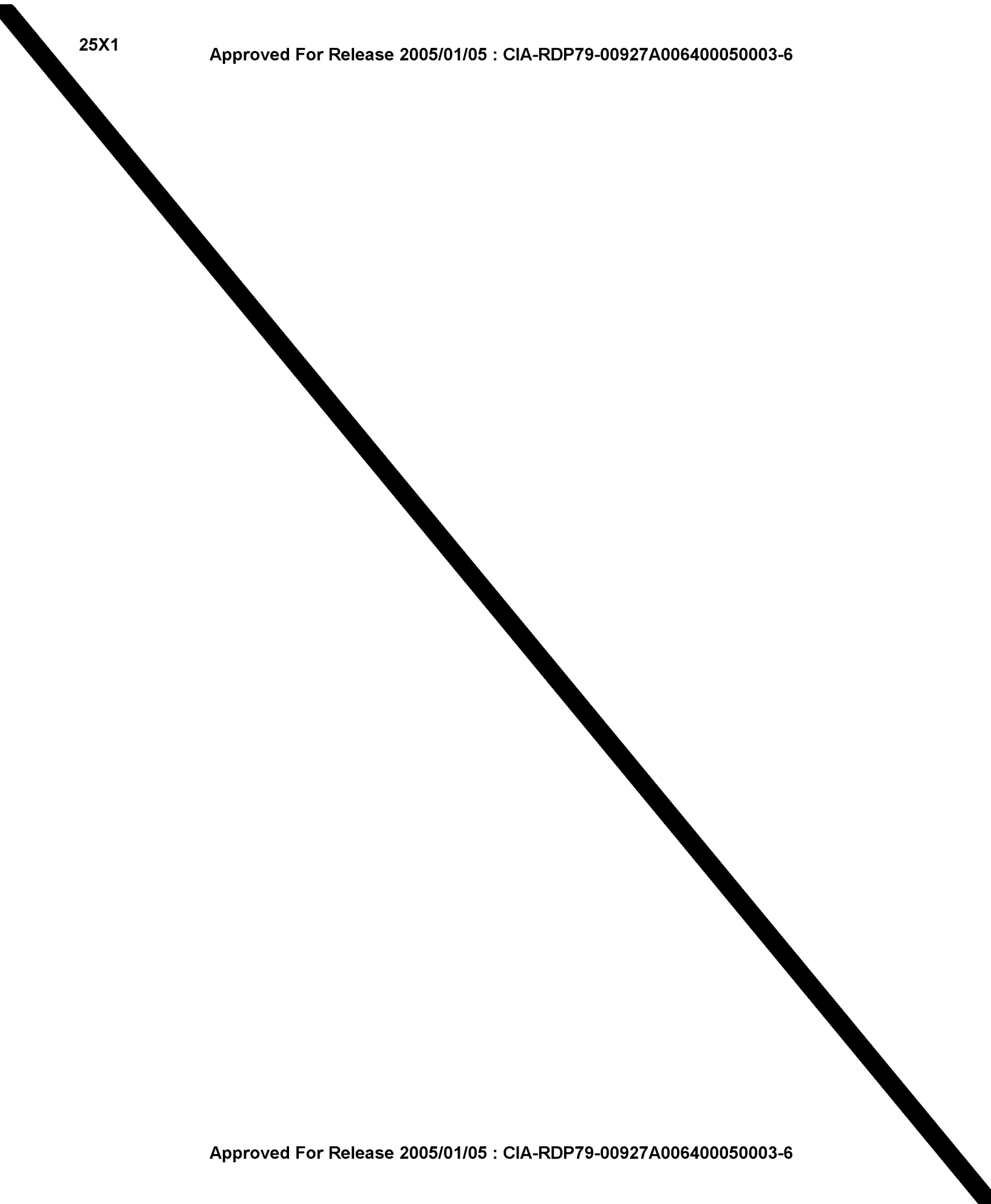

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## SOVIET REACTIONS TO THE CHANGES IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Soviet reactions to the recent changes in Czechoslovakia have been belated and ineffectual, probably because of Moscow's reliance on leaders of the conservative and pro-Novotny faction for information and appraisals of developments in Prague. As a result of their mistaken belief that the opposition to Novotny was dominated by rival conservative leaders, the Soviets intervened on his behalf only in late December 1967, when it was already too late. Subsequently, they apparently overestimated the extent to which Novotny's successor, Alexander Dubcek, could be influenced by the conservative wing of the Czechoslovak party. Despite signs of continuing Soviet concern with the course of events in Prague, the Czechoslovaks were not called to account until the Dresden meeting in mid-March 1968, when "democratization" in Czechoslovakia had already progressed so far as to pose a potential threat to the stability of other Communist regimes. In the face of the Dubcek regime's stubborn defense of its policies at Dresden and elsewhere, the Soviets have apparently continued to work with the conservative faction in Prague, whose influence they may still be overestimating.

### The Soviet-Czechoslovak Relationship Under Novotny

Moscow appears to have been as surprised by the "bloodless revolution" in Prague as were the Western capitals. Before the October plenum of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet's complacency apparently was fully justified. Czechoslovakia, under First Secretary and President Antonin Novotny, ranked among the most conservative and docile of the Eastern European regimes. Many of the political and economic reforms that had been undertaken, with Soviet approval, in several other Eastern European countries had been at best only halfheartedly pursued in Czechoslovakia.

First Secretary Novotny, despite his uninspired leadership, had commended himself to the Soviets by his complete loyalty and reliability. Except for a brief lapse at the time of Khrushchev's ouster, Novotny had always aligned himself with the Soviet policy line of the moment.

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25X1 [redacted] no decision of any consequence was made in Novotny's Czechoslovakia without Soviet approval. The Soviets' control was exercised through their embassy in Prague, through advisers attached to key ministries of the Czechoslovak Government, and through frequent consultations between Czechoslovak officials and their Soviet counterparts.

The close and virtually frictionless cooperation that existed between Novotny and his Soviet mentors also proved to have its drawbacks. [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] the Soviets relied almost completely on Novotny for appraisals of the political situation in Czechoslovakia. As a result, they overestimated his ability to suppress political opposition and underestimated the extent of the dissatisfaction that was building within the party and among the general populace.

ANTONIN NOVOTNY

## Belated Soviet Intervention On Novotny's Behalf

The open attacks on Novotny's leadership made during the Czechoslovak party presidium meeting of 30-31 October came as a complete surprise to both Novotny and Soviet Ambassador Chervonenko.

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25X1 [redacted] there is no evidence that Moscow attempted to support Novotny's position in any way at this time, when the prospects for a successful intervention were still good. The anti-Novotny group, composed of economic reformers and Slovak "nationalists,"

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was still in the minority. It is highly unlikely that it would have been joined at this early stage by anti-Novotny conservatives if there had been strong Soviet opposition to their cause.

The liberal and moderate opposition continued to agitate against Novotny in the ensuing weeks, but there was still no Soviet intervention. When the party leaders assembled again in early December, the presidium was deadlocked and the tide was clearly against Novotny.

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AMBASSADOR CHERVONENKO

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Alexander Dubcek, a compromise choice, succeeded Novotny as first secretary on 5 January.

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the Soviets apparently were aware that Dubcek would succeed Novotny well before the general public

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## Soviet Assessment of Dubcek

Although the Soviets must have been disappointed by their failure to avert Novotny's downfall, they apparently still considered Dubcek an acceptable successor.

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LEONID BREZHNEV

With Dubcek's election, the Soviets moved to adapt their tactics to the new situation. Apparently they believed, along with most Western observers

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that Dubcek could be relied on to hold the line of his predecessor's orthodox and strongly pro-Soviet policies.

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This assessment appeared to be correct in the days immediately following the January plenum.

Dubcek and Novotny, who had remained as president, appeared together at the Soviet Embassy on 5 January to pledge their continued cooperation with the Soviet Union.

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The Soviets, however, again underestimated the pressures for change within Czechoslovakia. Aided by an almost total relaxation of censorship, demands for sweeping democratic changes and for the complete elimination of Novotny and other old-guard conservatives from the leadership grew louder and more widespread in the following weeks.

## Growing Soviet Concern

Soviet concern, and perhaps uncertainty, about the continuing pressures for democratization in Czechoslovakia was evident in the failure of the Soviet press to comment on developments in Czechoslovakia following the initial flurry of publicity. Some elements in the Czechoslovak press appeared to consider Moscow's silence as an implicit warning. The Soviets, however, were probably primarily concerned about the repercussions of Czechoslovak democratization within their own society. Soviet fears that the example of "socialist democracy" in Czechoslovakia would prove contagious were shared by leaders in East Germany and Poland. The Polish student demonstrations that broke out in March undoubtedly contributed to these fears.

Moreover, the Soviets must have been alert to the apparent contradiction between Dubcek's frequent expressions of loyalty to Moscow and the comments of other officials before domestic audiences, which stressed the necessity of adjusting Czechoslovak foreign policy to the national interest. Although the domestic remarks were inevitably accompanied by orthodox expressions of "proletarian internationalism," more specific suggestions appeared in the Czechoslovak press, leaving the content of the Czechoslovak version of "internationalism" open to question.

The concern felt by the Soviets and, to varying degrees, by the leaders of the other Eastern European countries, undoubtedly lay behind the travels of the high-level delegations that shuttled between Moscow, Prague, and the other Eastern European capitals in the following weeks. Dubcek appeared in Moscow on 29-30 January; Marshal Yakubovsky,

ALEXANDER DUBCEK

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the Soviet commander of the Warsaw Pact forces, visited Prague in late February; the leaders of the Warsaw Pact states, headed by Brezhnev, were in Prague in mid-February for the ceremonies commemorating the 1948 coup; and General Pepich, chief of the Political Directorate of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense, went to Moscow in mid-March with Oldrich Cernik, who later became premier of Czechoslovakia but who was then economic planning boss [redacted]

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Leaders of other Eastern European states who met with the Czechoslovaks during this period included Gomulka of Poland, Kadar of Hungary, and Foreign Minister Winzer of East Germany--all Czechoslovakia's immediate neighbors and those with the most reason to fear the effects of "liberalization" in Prague.


"Life has it's idiocies"...

DIKOBRAZ, Czech Satirical Weekly, 28 Mar 68

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Although these visits were invariably described as "routine" in nature, the Czechoslovak press has since stated, without official contradiction, that they were all for the purpose of "explaining"--read "defending"--developments in Czechoslovakia to Prague's allies.

Even though Prague made no immediate move to act on any of the more radical revisions of foreign policy that had been suggested in the press--including the establishment or re-establishment of diplomatic relations with West Germany and Israel--the Czechoslovaks demonstrated a new independence at the Budapest preparatory conference of Communist parties in late February and early March, and at the Sofia meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders on 6-8 March. Although the Czechoslovaks ultimately accepted the Soviet position at both meetings, Prague's leaders expressed their "understanding" of some of the disparate positions held by the Rumanians and Yugoslavs.

## The Dresden Meeting And Its Aftermath

Czechoslovakia's increasingly erratic course, both at home and, to a lesser degree, in the foreign policy field, contributed to its allies' suspicions. Prague's repeated assurances of loyalty, met with growing distrust throughout February and into March. The mounting tension culminated in the Dresden meeting of 23 March, which led to a confrontation between Prague's new leaders and those of five of her Warsaw Pact allies. The Rumanians, who could have been expected to align themselves with the Czechoslovaks, were not invited.

The Dresden meeting, which was officially labeled a "continuation" of the Sofia conference, is reported to have been called at the insistence of the East Germans, who felt themselves most threatened by developments in Prague.

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The Dresden meeting was followed by a brief relaxation of tensions. The rumors that had abounded in Prague of menacing troop movements in East Germany and Hungary and of an impending economic blockade, gradually subsided in the face of official denials and lack of confirmation.

The de facto truce was broken only by the East Germans,

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who unleashed a brief assault on Prague by denouncing Josef Smrkovsky, a leader of the liberal wing of the Czechoslovak party, as a pawn of the West German revanchists. The Soviets, however, did not join in the East German attacks, which drew an almost unprecedented diplomatic protest from Prague.

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The Czechoslovaks, for their part, contributed to the easing of tensions in late March by nominating Ludvik Svoboda, an aging, pro-Soviet, war hero, to succeed Novotny as president. The Soviets apparently accepted his election as a gesture of good will.

## Signs of a Hardening Soviet Attitude

The post-Dresden atmosphere of accommodation endured little more than a week. On 4 April, the Soviet journal Sovietskaya Rossiya published a harshly worded critique of developments in Prague, written by an obscure Soviet academician. The article's attacks on "nationalism" and "revisionism," and its demands for strengthening the unity of the "socialist camp," echoed remarks Brezhnev had made in a speech on 29 March.

These earlier developments presaged the statement issued after the Soviet central committee plenum of 8-9 April. The statement approved Brezhnev's report on Soviet efforts to strengthen the unity of the socialist camp and of the international Communist movement. Its condemnation of domestic dissidents and of alleged Western attempts to use "nationalist" and "bourgeois" tendencies in an effort to "split" the socialist camp was a gauge of Soviet concern with the possible reverberations of events in Prague as, indeed, was the agenda of the plenum itself. The plenum line has since been carried to the public in a series of articles in Izvestia and Pravda as well as through the speeches of politburo members.

Prague has been acutely aware of the implications of the new Soviet propaganda stance. Although the Czechoslovaks have carefully avoided a sharp or official response, the Sovietskaya Rossiya article and a speech delivered by Soviet politburo member V. V. Grishin were directly rebutted by unofficial Czechoslovak publications and were criticized for their misrepresentation of developments in Prague.

There have been other indications that the Soviets are taking an increasingly dim view of events in Prague. 25X1

the favorable reception that the Soviets initially accorded the recently adopted action program of the Czechoslovak party was dropped after a closer, and more critical, examination of the document. 25X1

There has been as yet no evidence, however, to indicate that the Soviets have accompanied their public criticism with any effort to coerce the Prague regime directly. For its part, Prague has

shown no inclination to adjust its policies to take account of Soviet criticism.

The Budapest meeting of the preparatory commission for the world conference of Communist parties, which ended on 28 April, again dramatized Prague's new willingness to express an independent viewpoint. For example, the Czechoslovak delegate put forward the opinion that the meeting should be conducted in an open manner, a view that was at odds with a well-known Soviet position. Shortly before the opening of the conference, the Czechoslovak stand, as presented in the party daily, had been implicitly criticized in Pravda, but to no apparent effect.

## Outlook

The Czechoslovaks have thus far avoided throwing down the gauntlet to Moscow, as the Rumanians have done. The differences that have arisen have been the result of Prague's determination to "nationalize" its domestic and foreign policies, albeit within the framework of a vaguely defined "communism" and "socialist internationalism." Despite the intentions of Czechoslovakia's new rulers, however, the further elaboration of "national" policies will almost inevitably give rise to other, and perhaps more open, disputes with Moscow.

Some of the areas of probable future disagreement are already apparent. The Czechoslovaks are reported to be determined to allow multicandidate elections and to permit some form, as yet undefined, of legal opposition to the regime. In addition, according to a Czechoslovak jurist who spoke in Washington on 26 April, a new Czechoslovak constitution, presently being prepared, will not give sanction to the party's "leading role." The Soviets, with their adherence to the totalitarian form of orthodox Marxism-Leninism, are certain to regard these political innovations as a form of revisionism.

Differences will also arise when Prague moves to carry out its announced intention of revising its foreign policy in terms of its national interests. At the least, more verbal strife with Moscow is certain to break out if Prague moves, as the Czechoslovak press has advocated, to establish diplomatic relations with Bonn and Tel Aviv, to expand trade and cultural ties with the West, and to press for a sweeping revision of intrabloc trade and economic relations. There are some indications that Prague has already begun to reduce its economic and military aid obligations to the nonaligned countries.

In the likely event that Soviet criticism will be ignored, Moscow's further response to a continued revision of Czechoslovak domestic and foreign policy is still an open question. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the system of controls that existed under Novotny has largely broken down. Moscow will probably still continue, however, to attempt to work with the conservatives in

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Czechoslovakia. [redacted] the Soviet ambassador has met frequently with members of the conservative faction within the Czechoslovak party. Moscow probably hopes that these elements can at least keep the scope of change in Czechoslovakia within acceptable bounds. The Soviets, however, may again be overestimating the influence of these individuals.

In the event that Moscow should feel obliged to exert more concrete forms of pressure, Czechoslovakia's dependence on the Soviet Union for imports of essential raw materials and fuel supplies and as a market for its exports, few of which could compete on the world market, provides Moscow with a handy lever. To date, however, there is no evidence that Moscow has attempted to use this advantage. The Soviets are presumably aware of the historic ineffectiveness of economic sanctions as a means of exerting political control and are not likely to employ them except in the event of an open rift.

There remains the ultimate option, military force, but Moscow would presumably have to believe itself directly threatened before it would intervene militarily. This belief would only result from a drastic action on the part of the Czechoslovaks, such as a renunciation of their alliance with the USSR. The caution that the Dubcek regime has demonstrated thus far indicates this is not a likely possibility. The outlook, therefore, is for a continuation of the present state of mutual suspicion and caution. [redacted]

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